

# **Chapter 3:**

## **The 2020 Visioning Process**

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## INTRODUCTION

HNTB was contracted by the Carmel/Clay Plan Commission in December 1994 to update the Land Use, Thoroughfare Plan and components of the Comprehensive Plan. Soliciting citizens' opinions regarding the vision they have for the Carmel/Clay community was of the utmost importance and would represent the foundation for the other subsequent detailed planning. An intensive and encompassing, citizen involvement methodology was desired. A relatively short amount of completion time for the visioning process was a criterion to meet in order to maintain a high level of public involvement/interest. The process took approximately six months and was completed prior to the schools' summer vacation and in its entirety, this visioning process involved nearly 1,000 residents of the Carmel/Clay area.

The Carmel/Clay 2020 Vision was a process of varied citizen participation/involvement techniques including surveys, Focus Groups, and Neighborhood Meetings. It was designed to reach all segments of the population from school-age children to the elderly. The product of this process is a series of ten goals the community wishes to maintain, achieve and improve as it continues to mature. Cognizance of these goals, as a foundation for subsequent planning and decision-making, will assure that this desired quality of life is achieved.

The 2020 Vision is the culmination of citizen viewpoints and previous planning efforts. Its importance lies in being a consensus document which spells out the quality of life issues which are important to the community. Having this document of fundamental goals and actions, more detailed planning efforts can be pursued and correlated to one another because of the development of a common set of community objectives. The chart on the following page graphically relates the 2020 Vision process in terms of policy-making in the Carmel/Clay community.

## METHODOLOGY

It was apparent that numerous techniques should be used to attain input from a cross-section of the population, with the hope that this sample would typify age, gender, demographic, and economic groups of the area.



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## **Citizen Survey**

The Indiana University Public Opinion Laboratory was contracted to conduct approximately 400 telephone surveys of Carmel/Clay residents. Each person was randomly selected and screened to assure the sample was representative of the city and township residents. Using the 1989 city/township citizen survey as a bench mark, the 1995 was edited to reflect current issues and trends. The responses from both the 1989 and the 1995 surveys were compared and these trends were then used to identify key issues of concern, and subsequent goals for the community.

## **Kids in Planning Series**

Upon initial research, it was noted that approximately 30% of Carmel/Clay's population is under the age of 18. This is a significant portion of the community. The schools were collectively approached with the concept of soliciting input from this segment. Schools which initially expressed interest included Carmel Elementary, College Wood, Mohawk Trails, Smoky Row, Carmel Junior High and Carmel High Schools. Each school was then met with individually in order to gauge their level of involvement and time constraints.

Carmel Elementary, College Wood, Smoky Row, and Carmel Junior High used a prewritten survey, whereas Mohawk Trails and Carmel High School developed their own techniques. The third graders from Mohawk Trails went through a week of Junior Achievement education about communities and then developed and conducted their own survey. Carmel High School video taped a group discussing the pros and cons of Carmel/Clay, in addition to conducting a written survey.

## **Focus Groups**

Services of The Kensington Group were utilized to moderate two small group discussions called "Focus Groups". Walker Research randomly selected 10 to 12 residents as participants in each of these discussions. These participants represented a geographic and demographic cross-section of the community. The objectives of these Focus Groups were as follows:

- *To better understand the issues and concerns that are important to residents.*



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- *To determine the general direction for planning which residents would suggest.*
  - *To better understand and define these issues.*

### **Statistical Information**

Gathering this information was the first step in analyzing the trends of the community. Various graphics depicting building, land use, population trends, etc. were produced and displayed at the Neighborhood Meetings. Maps portraying stages of urbanization were represented and are included on the following page. To accompany these maps were pie charts showing the percentage of land use during the years 1971, 1985, 1995 as well as projected land use percentages for 2000 and 2010. In addition to land use trends, population trends were also gathered and projected. Understanding the rate and how the community historically developed will assist in comprehending projected growth/development rates and patterns.

### **Photographic Survey**

To get a better understanding of how the residents truly wanted to see Carmel/Clay, photos were displayed showing elements of Carmel/Clay and other communities (Charmers and Clunkers). After review, citizens were asked to identify and compare the most/least desired images for the community.

### **Neighborhood Meetings**

Convenience and accessibility of meetings for residents is essential throughout any planning process. The scheduling of the Neighborhood Meetings was based on the location of the eight elementary schools; which are generally viewed as communal and familiar. Citizens were encouraged to attend the meeting conveniently located in their school district or in one where they felt strong ties. The same information and format were presented at each of the eight Neighborhood Meetings.

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Residents were presented with statistical information (i.e., urbanization, land use and population trends) represented in graphic form as well as in tables/charts. This information was provided to educate the citizens on the history of their community. After being supplied with the basic information, residents were asked to break into small work groups of about 6-8 persons, to answer the following questions, and then present the group's responses:

- *What are the neighborhood features you want preserved/protected?*
- *What are the community features you want preserved/protected?*
- *What are the quality of life features which currently do not exist that you would like to see in Carmel/Clay Township?*

The following were the original twelve (12) Items of Consensus as compiled from the Neighborhood Meetings. (This listing does not necessarily represent the priority.) Later in the planning process, the twelve were combined into ten Items of Consensus.

- The concept of neighborhood schools should be preserved and protected.
- The safe and secure feeling of neighborhoods should be maintained.
- The nature of housing in Carmel/Clay should continue to be predominately low density.
- Continue and enhance growth management.
- Preserve and enhance natural features of the community.
- Continue Dads Club as a community asset.
- Encourage proactive infrastructure planning.
- Expand open space opportunities in the community.
- Revitalize/Reuse existing retail centers.
- Continue efforts to revitalize downtown Carmel.
- Develop a community center.
- Enhance East-West access across community.

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## **Volunteer Solicitation**

An open invitation was extended to all Carmel/Clay citizens to personally become involved in the process and meetings.

## **Media Relations**

A media program was developed and implemented as a means to communicate with and update all Carmel/Clay residents. Throughout the process this included, but was not limited to flyers, newsletters, newspaper articles & notices, banners, and television advertisements.

## **Town Hall Meetings**

After concluding the eight Neighborhood Meetings, three Town Hall Meetings/Ice Cream Socials were held to inform residents of the progress as well as for them to suggest changes and/or correct misconceptions. The presentation at each meeting was as follows:

- I. Summary of Findings:  
Citizen Identification & Verification of Major Issues*
- II. Presentation of Alternative Action Steps*
- III. Presentation of the Draft Document*

At the first Town Hall Meeting participants were presented with the same graphics as those used at the Neighborhood Meetings, along with a sheet to prioritize the top six issues, a photographic survey, a document summarizing the twelve major Items of Consensus, and a video highlighting the Kids in Planning Series. A question and answer period was also conducted.

Upon noting the suggestions from Town Hall Meeting I, a series of Alternative Action Steps were developed and presented to the public at Town Hall Meeting II for additional confirmation and edits. Participants were furnished a summary of the major issues as well as the Alternative Action Steps and given the opportunity to make suggested revisions.

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Town Hall Meeting III consisted of a presentation of the draft document and final comments.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

During the visioning process every comment is vital, therefore, all citizen input was carefully documented. To keep the information at a manageable level, a consensus of the findings was formed. The information gathered from the Neighborhood Meetings, along with the Citizen Survey and the first Focus Group was the basis for the identification of the ten major issues needing to be addressed.

### **Citizen Survey**

A majority of the residents rated the quality of life in Carmel/Clay as either excellent or good (94%). The number one reason for living in this area as taken from the 1995 survey was the quality of the school system (36%) with convenience to work (19%), and convenience to family (7%). However, in the 1989 survey, the top three included schools (28%), quality of life (24%), and neighborhoods (14%).

Issues facing Carmel/Clay over the next 5 years seemed to coincide with the reasons for people choosing to live in the area: population growth/overpopulation (19%), maintaining school quality (18.2%), and growth of schools/redistricting (15.5%) are as taken from the 1995 survey. While a few of the same issues were mentioned in the 1989 survey the top three were as follows over development (36%), traffic/roads (31%), and green space (9%). When using the 1989 results as a bench mark, it is easy to see that growth management was a recurring issue, along with the fact that school related issues seem more prevalent now.

### **Kids in Planning Series**

Although not every student was asked to state an opinion, a significant number participated. This included participation from: 147 elementary, 76 junior high, and 94 high school students. Most of the students involved in this aspect seemed sincerely interested in having their opinions heard.



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A notable amount of students felt that there are not enough recreation opportunities for the youth (60%, 69.9%, and 60.6%, respectively). A consistently stated issue at the elementary level was the fact that trees were being destroyed to build more homes. Fifty-five percent (55%) of junior high students felt strongly that the growth of the community is occurring too fast. The students' responses for the same question regarding the issues facing Carmel/Clay over the next five years varied considerably from their adult counterparts with only one remaining constant: the issue of over-development/over population. At the high school level, the top three issues were drugs (51.1%), over-development (35.1%), and crime (21.3%). Junior high students stated housing costs (35.5%), over-development (34.2%), and traffic/roads (28.9%) will be the future issues.

### **Neighborhood Meetings**

Each Neighborhood Meeting followed the same format and was provided with the same statistical information trends and projections. The twelve Items of Consensus which were subsequently refined into ten goals were gleaned from those stated at each Neighborhood Meeting. Many concerns were similar while others were unique to that particular area. The Neighborhood Meetings were highly interactive and involved small group discussions about community quality of life features to be maintained or improved. While each of the eight meetings had a particular issue unique to that geographic area of the community, several Items of Consensus were common to all meetings. This included the desire for strong growth management, the need for a community center, retention of neighborhood schools, and public policy to expand the availability of open space and park land.

### **Focus Groups**

The use of Focus Groups were invaluable as a technique to evaluate and discuss findings of the Citizen Survey and Neighborhood Meetings. The Focus Groups enabled detailed discussions to ascertain the reasoning behind certain priorities. Upon development of the twelve Items of Consensus for the Neighborhood Meetings, one of the Focus Group sessions ranked the importance of dealing with certain issues. Interestingly, this ranking was strikingly similar to the prioritization by the first Town Hall Meeting. These priorities are identified in the table.



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## PROPOSED ACTION STEPS

The following ten goals represent the quality of life features residents of Carmel/Clay would like to see maintained or improved as the community matures. These ten goals and their subsequent suggested action steps have been organized into four broad topic areas including; Housing and Neighborhoods, Growth Management, Commerce and Economy, and Recreation and Open Space.

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### Housing and Neighborhoods

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*Preserve and protect the concept of neighborhood elementary schools.*

- On a semi-annual basis, the City Council and the School Board should meet together to discuss planning for neighborhood schools.
- The Department of Community Development and the School District should continue to meet regularly to discuss trends in growth and development.
- The School Board should continue its policy of developing and maintaining neighborhood elementary schools.
- During the development review process, the future school sites should be dedicated.
- Expand opportunities for multiple use of school facilities to continue their identity with adjacent neighborhoods

*The Nature of Housing in Carmel/Clay should continue to be of a single family variety.*

- Public policy should continue the course of giving preference to single family housing.
- Residential zoning should be rewritten to specifically guide the level of density desired within each district.
- Revise the Zoning Code so that uses permitted in the district are related to the district's purpose.
- Ensure the stability of existing neighborhoods through code enforcement and infrastructure maintenance.
- The functions of the Plan Commission and the Board of Zoning Appeals should be defined and clarified to give the Plan Commission authority over land use decision-making.

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*Maintain the safe and secure feeling of neighborhoods.*

- The City/Township subdivisions shall continue to be reviewed for development standards encouraging safe neighborhoods including sidewalks, lighting standards, etc.
- Empower neighborhood residents through the formation of Homeowners Association.
- Sustain the current high level of service provided for emergency services (police, fire, etc.).
- New development proposals will continue to be reviewed with a focus toward ensuring safe neighborhoods.
- Design new trails and parks with an emphasis on neighborhood safety.

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## **Growth Management**

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*Encourage proactive infrastructure planning and enhance east-west access.*

- The City shall adopt a five year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to fund infrastructure maintenance and replacement in existing neighborhoods, as well as new facilities in growth areas.
- Similar steps should be encouraged for the development of five year CIP programs in the unincorporated portions of Clay Township.
- The City should evaluate alternative financing techniques through which new development would pay its fair share of impact on infrastructure.
- The City/Township Plan Commission should consider updating its development codes to reflect new development control techniques.
- Update the community's standard for drainage and stormwater management.
- Planning for non-vehicular travel (walks, bike routes, and trails) should continue to be encouraged in order to reduce home/convenience oriented automotive trips.
- In its evaluation of future road classifications/improvements along U.S. 31 and 431, East-West access must be improved for auto as well as pedestrian traffic to avoid the Township being divided into three separate areas.

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*Methods to improve growth management should be enhanced*

- The Carmel/Clay Zoning and Subdivision Regulations should be amended to reflect the adopted 2020 Vision and Land Use Plan.
- A five year CIP plan shall be adopted by the City of Carmel.
- The City of Carmel and Hamilton County should meet annually to discuss priorities for transportation improvements.
- A development referral process shall be introduced by the Department of Community Development to be adopted between Carmel/Clay and Hamilton County, Westfield, Noblesville, Zionsville, Fishers, and the City of Indianapolis. All development proposals within a half mile radius of the Township line shall be routed by the adjacent communities for review and comments.
- Adopt development standards which promote innovative development patterns, protect natural resources and provide open space.

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## **Recreation and Open Space**

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*Develop a community center to serve the needs of the Carmel/Clay population.*

- Conduct an evaluation of program and space needs to determine the magnitude and range of alternatives. The center should be oriented to meet a cross section of needs from youth to elderly.
- The viability of reusing existing facilities (i.e., the Plaza) vs. construction of a new facility should be assessed
- The need and desire for a community center shall be incorporated into the five year CIP.
- Programming alternatives should be discussed with the School Board to identify joint use opportunities (i.e., continued use of gyms, new joint pool for high school and the community).

*Significant natural features should be preserved and open space/public park land expanded.*

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- Utilizing findings of the Vision Plan as a foundation, a detailed five year Parks and Recreation Plan should be prepared for Carmel/Clay Township. Such plan should identify long-term natural features to be preserved, open space areas to be acquired, and park land to be developed.
  - The Carmel/Clay Township Subdivision Code should be revised to provide for the ability to require dedication of significant environmental features and trail segments during the development review process.
  - Development of the Monon as a major community and regional north-south non automotive corridor through Clay Township and connecting into the Indianapolis segment should be implemented.
  - Include funding for acquisition and maintenance of existing public open space/park improvements in a five year CIP.
  - Evaluate alternative financing techniques through which new developments would bear a more equitable share of responsibility for new parks and open space.
  - Inventory important natural and historic areas in Carmel/Clay worthy of protection.

*Continue Dads Club as a community asset.*

- The Dads Club should continue to develop a formal relationship for field use with the school district.
- As part of the five year Parks and Recreation master planning process for Carmel/Clay Township, active field needs will be analyzed based on the projected population.
- The Dads Club should pursue acquisition of additional fields through joint use agreements with the Carmel/Clay Park Board and school district.
- On an annual basis the Dads Club and Park Boards shall meet in a planning session to discuss goals, scheduling and capital facility planning.

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## **Commerce and Economy**

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*Revitalize/Reuse existing retail centers.*

- Develop a comprehensive inventory of all retail centers in Clay Township.
- Encourage the Chamber of Commerce to develop an annual report identifying absorption and vacancy rates of the retail centers.
- The City should enhance its business retention strategy as the basic element of its economic development plan.
- Commercial development proposals shall require an economic impact assessment prior to development review. Such assessment shall identify demographic and market conditions which substantiate the need for such development.

*Actions to revitalize downtown Carmel should continue.*

- Planned public infrastructure improvements should be continued.
- Building owners should be encouraged to restore their building facades.
- Strategies to redevelop areas of Main and Rangeline should be prepared.
- Public celebrations and festivals should center their activities around the downtown nucleus.

## **CONCLUSION**

By the year 2020 it is projected that the Carmel/Clay area will have essentially been built out. At that point the area will be the residential home to approximately 85,000 persons. With those conditions in mind, a concerted effort was made during the 2020 Vision process to have existing citizens identify the quality of life features that would need to be detained and enhanced over the next 25 years.

During the six month planning process nearly 1,100 residents provided their input. The Goals and Action Steps represent the results of this citizen driven input process.



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The Carmel/Clay 2020 Vision is a consensus document that relates ten quality of life features citizens expect to be maintained or enhanced. As a policy-making tool it has the capacity to be used to guide budget priorities as well as serve a common foundation of community objectives for other subsequent detailed planning efforts such as the Long Range Land Use Plan, Thoroughfare Plan, and Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

The Carmel/Clay 2020 Vision is not an end-all document, but represents a comprehensive overview of the community's agenda for its future. It is an iterative product that pulls together input from a variety of means to establish a broad-based policy direction. Its value will be measured by how much it is used to guide future planning and development in the community.